



Morning Alert - Friday, August 10, 2018

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK gave top play to a report that Olympic wrestling champion Kaori Icho accepted an apology earlier this month from the chairman of the Japan Wrestling Federation over the harassment she was subjected to by her coach and decided to return to competition starting this October. NTV, Fuji TV, and TV Asahi led with reports that the head coach of the cheerleading club of Nihon University was dismissed for harassing a cheerleader. TBS gave top play to updates on the resignation of the chairman of the Japan Amateur Boxing Federation.

Major front-page items in national papers included a Transport Ministry announcement on Thursday that in addition to Subaru and Nissan, Suzuki, Mazda, and Yamaha have admitted to falsifying vehicle emission data; the memorial service held in Nagasaki yesterday to mark the 73rd anniversary of the atomic bombing; and a plan by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications to conduct a thorough review of the current competition policy for the telecommunications industry in preparation for the introduction of 5G mobile networks beginning in 2020.

SECURITY

Hearing on nullification of landfill permit held in Okinawa

All papers reported that the Okinawa prefectural government held a hearing on Thursday to allow the Okinawa Defense Bureau to make its own case regarding the late Governor Onaga's plan to revoke the landfill permit for the FRF construction. The papers projected that the two vice governors are likely to rescind the permit to honor the deceased governor's intention before Aug. 17 when the Defense Ministry plans to begin the landfill work off Camp Schwab.

Meanwhile, Nikkei wrote that a by-election to select Onaga's successor will probably be held either on Sept. 23 or 30, saying that local politicians close to the late governor and his core supporters have decided to field "someone who will maintain Onaga's resolve" never to allow a new U.S. military base to be built in the Henoko area. The paper added that the Abe administration and the ruling coalition are concerned that their candidate, Ginowan Mayor Sakima, may be forced to wage an uphill battle because Governor Onaga's sudden death is bound to galvanize anti-base forces.

Mainichi carried a similar story, adding that the Abe administration appears to be mourning the death of the governor despite his opposition to the government's Futenma relocation initiative based on the assessment that maintaining a low profile is necessary to avoid emboldening anti-base groups ahead of the by-election.

On a related note, most papers wrote that Governor Onaga's funeral will be held at a temple in Naha on Aug. 13.

Yokota AB already appears to be key platform for Ospreys

Tokyo Shimbun led with data compiled by an anti-base group in Tokyo concerning the use of Yokota AB by CV-22 Ospreys, noting that during what the U.S. military refers to as a "temporary deployment" that began on June 23, five tilt-rotor planes have landed at and taken off from the installation more than 120 times. The daily noted that local residents are especially concerned about the Osprey flights at night. The paper speculated that the Air Force variant of the MV-22 may have participated in training at the Higashi Fuji training area in Shizuoka Prefecture. While pointing out that the U.S. military has yet to make an official announcement on the permanent deployment of CV-22s at Yokota AB, which it had earlier said would start around summer, the daily claimed that the frequent use shows that the installation has already become a key platform for the tilt-rotor planes.

MOD to request largest defense budget ever

Asahi wrote that the Defense Ministry has informally decided to ask the Finance Ministry to earmark 5.4 trillion yen for national defense in the FY2019 budget, 200 billion yen higher than this fiscal year's budget request, saying that the introduction of very expensive equipment, such as two Aegis Ashore batteries and F-35A fighter jets will push the defense budget to the highest level ever. The daily added that the nation's defense expenditure may continue to soar beyond the next fiscal year amid the Trump administration's "Buy American" campaign.

ECONOMY

First day of U.S.-Japan trade talks ends

NHK reported this morning that the first day of the "FFR" (free, fair, and reciprocal) trade talks between the U.S. and Japan ended just before 6 a.m. today Japan time. Economic Revitalization Minister Motegi told reporters before the talks: "I think these are going to be very important talks. I hope to have a candid exchange of views with USTR Lighthizer and produce positive results."

Motegi is expected to speak to reporters after the meeting. The network said the talks will be held until tomorrow, adding that the Japanese side is apparently planning to stress the significance of a multilateral free-trade system to the U.S., which is eager to enter bilateral FTA talks with Japan. Noting that concern appears to be growing within the GOJ that the U.S. might call for further market opening in the automobile and agricultural sectors, the network said attention is focused on what kind of requests the U.S. has made.

Mixed expectations for beef trade in U.S.-Japan trade talks

Asahi focused on discussion of beef trade at the new trade talks between the USG and the GOJ in Washington, saying local cattlemen are bracing for the possibility of Japan being pressured by the Trump administration to lower import tariffs on American beef. The daily reported that one farmer said some Japanese cattlemen may be forced to quit the business if more imports of inexpensive American products are permitted. However, the restaurant industry is reportedly hoping that potential cuts in import duties will boost their business prospects since they will be able to offer high-quality U.S. beef at lower prices.

Mainichi filed a similar story, saying that Japanese farmers are afraid that amid strong U.S. pressure, the GOJ may agree to lower tariffs on American agricultural imports beyond the scope agreed upon under the TPP. The article claimed that expectations for substantial deliverables in the “free, fair, and reciprocal” (FFR) trade talks are mounting within U.S. farm lobbying groups, quoting a spokesperson of the U.S. Meat Export Federation as telling the daily: “America’s competitors are being put in an advantageous position when it comes to exporting beef to Japan due to the TPP and other trade deals. We hope that the U.S. and Japan will reach some kind of deal so that the U.S. can continue to be the most reliable supplier for Japan.”

INTERNATIONAL

Foreign Minister Kono called for dialogue in meeting with DPRK counterpart

Yomiuri front-paged the disclosure by several sources involved in Japan-DPRK relations that during a two-minute conversation with North Korean Foreign Minister Ri on the margins of an ASEAN-related conference in Singapore on Aug. 3, Foreign Minister Kono said: “We are ready to hold discussions. It is extremely important to resolve the abduction issue.” According to the sources, Ri neither rejected the Japanese proposal nor repeated the claim that the abduction issue has already been settled. Kono added that Japan is willing to normalize relations and offer economic cooperation based on the 2002 Pyongyang Declaration, to which the top DPRK diplomat responded: “The first thing that Japan must do is to come to terms with its past.”

North Korea criticizes U.S. for making “unilateral demands”

Yomiuri and Nikkei wrote from Seoul that the DPRK Foreign Ministry released a statement on Thursday denouncing the U.S. for making “unilateral demands” for denuclearization even though the DPRK has already taken concrete steps for confidence-building, such as dismantling a nuclear test

facility and returning the remains of U.S. soldiers killed in the Korean War. The ministry reportedly warned that without corresponding actions from the Trump administration, there will be “no progress” on denuclearization or other commitments made in the U.S.-DPRK summit in June. According to the dailies, the DPRK statement did not criticize President Trump and instead leveled accusations against “certain USG officials” for being preoccupied with applying sanctions and pressure on Pyongyang.

POLITICS

Ishiba to announce candidacy today for LDP presidential race

All dailies wrote that former LDP Secretary General Ishiba is expected to hold a press conference today to officially announce his plan to seek the LDP presidency. The papers predicted that since almost 70 to 80% of LDP lawmakers have already indicated their support for Prime Minister Abe’s reelection bid, the chances are slim that Ishiba will prevail in the presidential election to be held around Sept. 20.

